

## Gent Open 2018

Straight after the South Wales International, Tom Brown and I headed for St Pancras station and a Eurostar train to the beautiful Belgian city of Gent (sometimes also spelled 'Ghent' but locally they prefer no 'h') . As soon as you arrive you are quickly reminded that you are in Flanders rather than the Francophone southern half of the country... in this most multi-lingual of places and tournaments, we heard Flemish, Dutch, English and German all being spoken more than French - the first language I associate with the country !

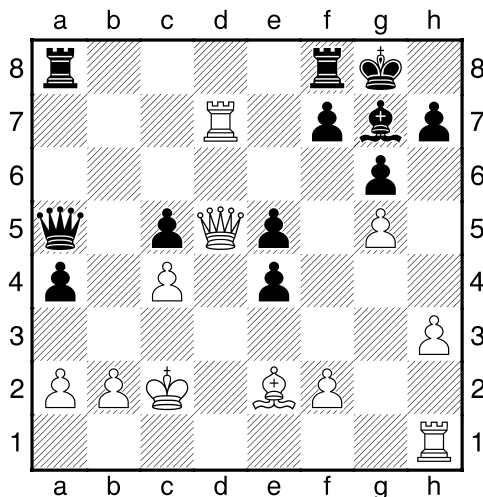
I'd also heard about the Gent Festival – a massive musical (and beer-drinking !) extravaganza that completely takes over the centre of town and attracts about 1.5 million visitors every year. We met up with a quite a few English players who are regularly drawn here by all aspects of the entertainment on offer.

Mainly though we were here for the chess and the basic set-up was this. A 9-round Swiss with around 220 players in the main group headed by 4 GM's and another 2500 (more of whom later). A decent sprinkling of 24,23 and 2200's were then followed a large troupe of 2000-2200's. 84 of the field had (FIDE) ratings over 2000 so we were going meet plenty of them.

My first round win is probably best skipped over. With White against a 1700 I played a fairly shallow and dubious line, but my opponent succumbed at the first opportunity and lost in 13 moves.

Onto the first proper test in round 2.

### Mauquoy,A. (2031) – Kett,T. (2230) [E90]



[I've been reading Ilya Smirin's excellent new book "Kings Indian Warfare" recently and had decided to play the KID at every opportunity in this tournament (with the pleasing result of 3/3 !). At this point I have decent chances but White's well-centralised Q and R mean it won't be easy to break through. At this point I recalled Smirin's Chapter on releasing the power of your dark-squared bishop and the examples he gave of sacrificing a pawn to do just this. The thought suddenly occurred to me here that sometimes you might have to give away two ....]

**22...e3! 23.fxe3 e4! 24.Qd2** [The small downside risk when playing this was opening the f-file for White's KR but Black is just in time there e.g. 24.Rf1 Rab8 25.Rxf7 Rxb2+ 26.Kd1 Rb1+ 27.Kc2 Qc3+! 28.Kxb1 Qb2#]

24...Qb6 25.Rb1 Rfd8 [and Black takes over control of all the main lines (0-1, 44)]

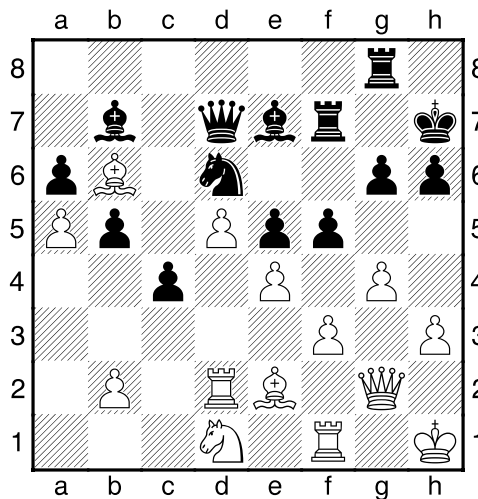
Round 3 saw another poor White opening from me:

1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.Bc4 Nxe4 4.Qh5 Nd6 5.Bb3 (hoping for the Frankenstein-Dracula variation 5...Nc6 6.Nb5!?) but my sensible young 2107-rated opponent saw no reason to enter that maelstrom) 5...Be7. Now I reasoned that since Black wouldn't have any serious problems if I recaptured the pawn with 6.Nxe5 that it made sense to continue to offer a gambit with 6.d3? instead. Black simply continued with 7...g6 8.Qg4 h5 9.Qh3 Nf5 and had a better position with a pawn up to boot. (0-1, 33). Lesson learned ? Probably not....

Round 4 was a tough manoeuvring battle in another KID which became more like a Benoni. At move 41 we reached the following position where the liberation of my dark-square bishop finally heralds the end (even if it's his light-squared colleague who delivers the final blow)

**Leemans,H. (2005) – Kett,Tim (2230) [E71]**

Gent Open (4), 15.07.2018

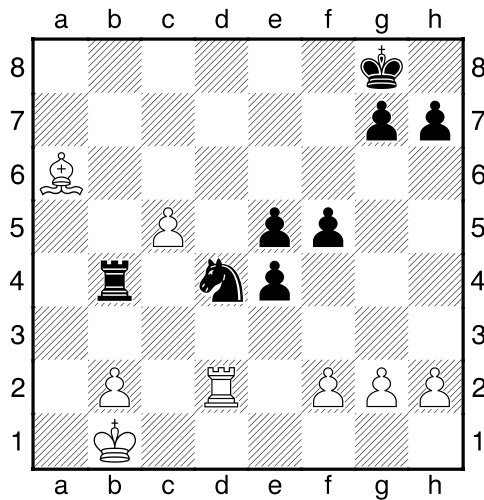


41...Bg5 42.Rc2 fxe4 43.fxe4 Rxf1+ 44.Bxf1 Nxe4! And Whites position finally caves in. 0-1

**Kett,Tim (2230) – Van Leusden,Dennis (2012) [D03]**

Gent Open (5), 16.07.2018

Whites Q-side pawns are struggling to move forward while Black seems to have a very firm grip on the midfield. One solution immediately suggested itself, but it needed to be carefully calculated...



**34.Rxd4! Rxd4 35.c6** [and that looks like that .... but its not quite so simple.]

**35...Rd1+ 36.Kc2 Rd6 37.Bb7!** [and Black's rook is still helpless]

**37...Rd4 38.Kb3 Rd3+ 39.Ka2**

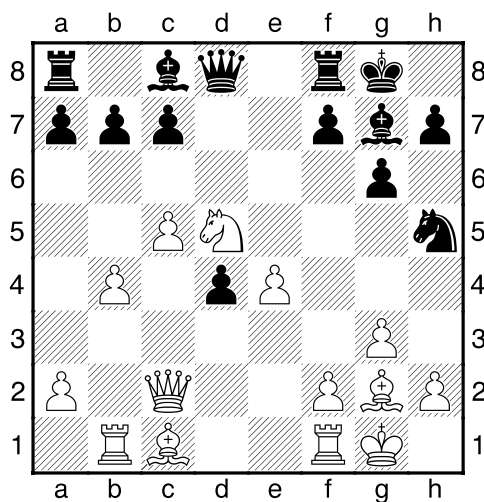
**1-0**

Now the tournament entered the tense final phase with a chance for some glory starting to beckon....

**Verhelst,Joris (2098) – Kett,Tim (2230) [A24]**

Gent Open (6), 16.07.2018

**1.c4 e5 2.g3 Nf6 3.Bg2 d6 4.Nc3 g6 5.d3 Bg7 6.Nf3 0-0 7.0-0 Nbd7 8.Rb1 Nc5 9.b4 Ne6 10.Qc2 Nh5 11.c5 d5 12.e4 dxe4 13.dxe4 Nd4 14.Nxd4 exd4 15.Nd5 [**



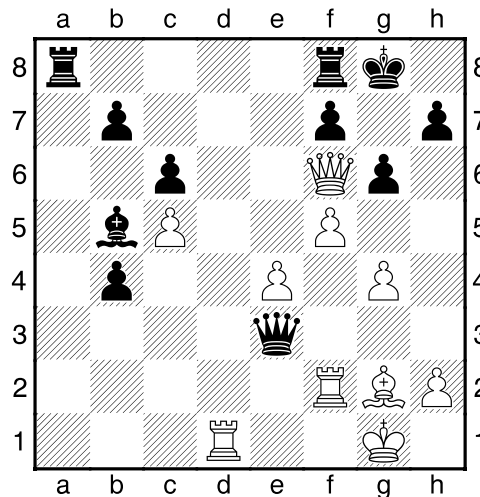
Now the obvious **15....c6 16.Nf4 Nxf4 17.Bxf4** is just equal. Its time to rock the boat a little....]

**15...d3!?** [Obviously this pawn may not live much longer, but it can cause a nuisance and give me time to generate some complications.]

**16.Qd2** [The obvious first trick is that 16.Qxd3 c6 17.Nf4 loses to 17...Nxf4 18.Qxd8 Ne2+]

**16...c6 17.Ne3 Be6 18.f4?** [White is provoked into this tempting, but loosening, advance. After the more restrained 18.Rd1 White should probably gain the upper hand.]

**18...Bd4 19.f5 Bc4 20.Rf2 Bb5 21.a4 Bxa4 22.Qxd3 Bb5 23.Qd2 a5 24.g4 Nf6 25.Bb2 Bxb2 26.Qxb2 Qd3 27.Rd1 Qxe3 28.Qxf6 axb4** [



and Black's Q can hold W's attack at bay while the b-pawn inexorably creeps forward]

**29.fxg6 hxg6 30.Kh1 Qc3 31.e5 Ra1 32.Rxa1 Qxa1+ 33.Bf1 b3 34.Rf3 Bxf1 35.Rxf1 Qd4 36.e6 Qxf6 37.Rxf6 b2**

**0-1**

Round 7 saw my 'highlight' game of the tournament, a win over a big fish – albeit a rather error-strewn one .....

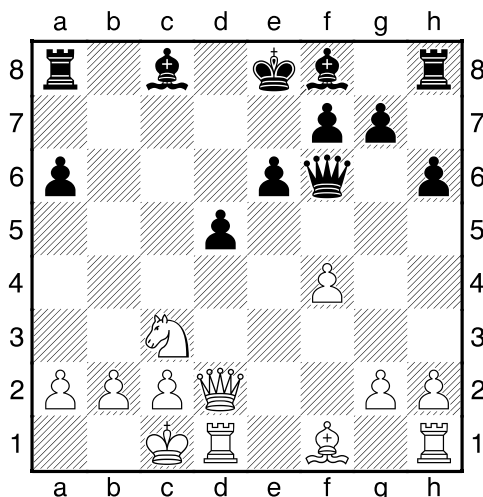
### **Kett, Tim (2230) – Venkataraman, Kritthik (2514) [B66]**

Ghent Open (7.4), 17.07.2018

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 Nf6 4.Nc3 cxd4 5.Nxd4 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 h6** [My opponent has played many different (Sicilian and non-Sicilian) defences and had no previous game with this exact line on my db so I wasn't prepped at all here. I'd had one previous painful loss from this position after (the more normal) 8.Bh4 (and the thematic ...g5 soon after in reply) and had found no easy improvement after that game – so thought I'd try something else.]

**8.Bxf6 Qxf6 9.Qd2 Nc6 10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.0-0-0** [Black's position is of course fine (i. e. roughly equal and with plenty of dynamic possibilities) here after the sensible re-routing 11....Qd8. Unfortunately for him he got a bit impatient instead.]

**11...d5? 12.exd5 cxd5**



OK, now spot the obvious sac !]

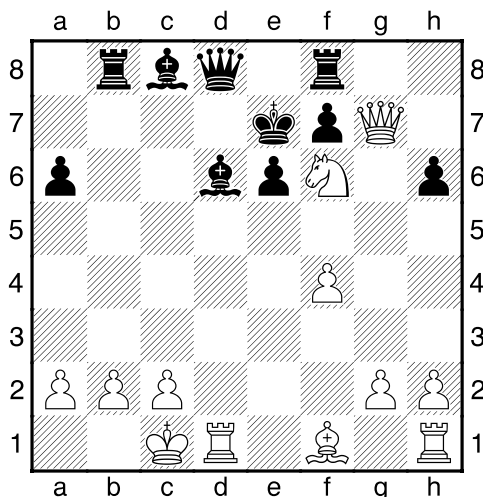
**13.Nxd5!** [Of course !]

**13...Qd8** [a sad necessity]

[If 13...exd5 14.Qxd5 Ra7 all that was needed was to see the follow-up idea 15.Bb5+! axb5 16.Rhe1+ and the rest follows naturally e.g. 16...Be6 (16...Be7 17.Qd8#) 17.Qc6+ Ke7 18.Qd6+ Ke8 19.Qb8+ Ke7 20.Qd8#]

**14.Qe3** [This position is already winning for White of course – but one slip from me and some resourceful defence from him, and it proved a tricky task to convert...]

**14...Rb8 15.Qe5 Bd6 16.Qxg7 Rf8 17.Nf6+ Ke7** [



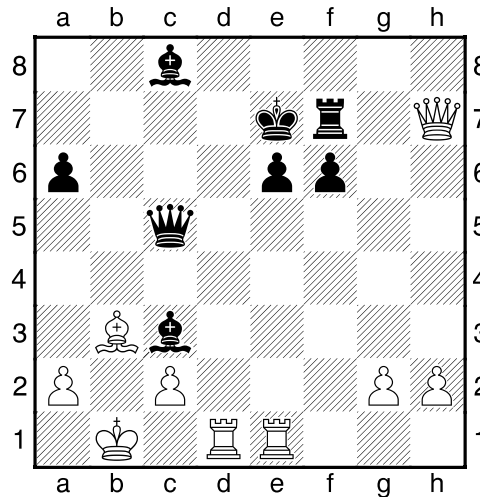
So far so good – but now I go wrong]

**18.Bc4?** [A strange and careless miscalculation here. I saw Bxf4+ and the follow-up idea Rxb2+ but too quickly dismissed it as not working. I remember even thinking "I could even play Ka1 if needed after that" but then ...Rxa2+! still works for him. As soon as I played the Bishop move I immediately got that horrible cold shiver of realisation that I could have just blown a huge chance...]

[The right way forward is 18.Nh5! defending f4 and freeing the long black diagonal for the WQ 18...Qb6 19.Qf6+ Kd7 20.Bc4 Kc7 21.Rd3 e5]

**18...Bxf4+ 19.Kb1 Rxb2+! 20.Kxb2 Qb6+ 21.Bb3 Be5+ 22.Kb1 Bxf6 23.Qxh6 Qc5** [White is still winning, I just need to be ready to sac the exchange to eliminate Black's dark-square bishop when necessary.]

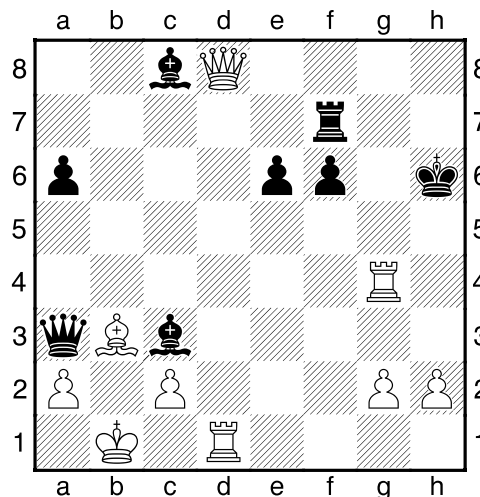
**24.Rhf1 Be5 25.Qh4+ f6 26.Rfe1 Bc3 27.Qh7+ Rf7**



**28.Qd3** [Safe]

[But a much quicker win was 28.Qg8! when Black doesn't have the ....Kf8 defence and so needs to stop Qd8# in a way that makes threatening ...Qb2# impossible 28...Qc7 29.Re4! is then curtains]

**28...Kf8 29.Qd8+ Kg7 30.Re4 Qa3 31.Rg4+ Kh6** [



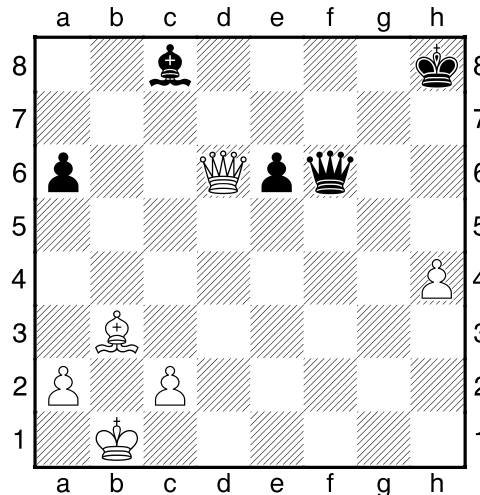
**32.Rg6+** [With 10 minutes left on my clock I had to fall back on this planned 'bailout']

[Yes, there was a forced win with 32.Qh8+! but it was a very long way away 32...Rh7 33.Rh4+ Kg5 34.Qg8+ Kxh4 35.Qxh7+ Kg5 36.h4+! and W mates in 12 (!) more moves according to my computer. I saw as far as h4+ but the trouble was of course that if I'd missed something and his K could escape the checks I could be instantly lost !]

**32...Kh5! 33.g4+ Kxg6 34.Qd3+ Kh6 35.Qxc3** [The reason for Black inserting .... Kh5 before ....Kxg6 is now clear – the g4 pawn protects his king from checks on the g–file]

**35...Qf8 36.h4 Kg6 37.Qd3+ Kg7 38.g5?!** [Another slightly hasty slip – missing Black's obvious next. Exchanging rooks reduces the danger to his king and means W will need ultimately to queen a pawn to win.]

**38...Rd7 39.gxf6+ Kh8 40.Qf3 Rxd1+ 41.Qxd1 Qxf6 42.Qd6!** [



The poor position of Black's bishop (which hasn't moved yet !) is now the decisive factor]

**42...Qc3 43.h5 a5 44.Qf8+ Kh7 45.Qf7+ Kh8 46.a4** [effectively Black is now in zugzwang and reluctantly offers a trade of queens in the absence of anything else that doesn't lose material or get mated]

**46...Qg7 47.Qe8+ Qg8 48.Qxg8+ Kxg8 49.Kb2 Bd7** [Finally completing his 'development' ! He played this rather quickly and with an air that he'd already written the game off.]

[Its not quite as simple as it may look though after 49...Kg7 50.Kc3 e5 51.Kc4 Kf6 W would need to tread carefully and ensure Black's e–pawn doesn't progress as 52.Kb5 e4 53.Kxa5 e3 54.Bc4 Bg4 is only a draw]

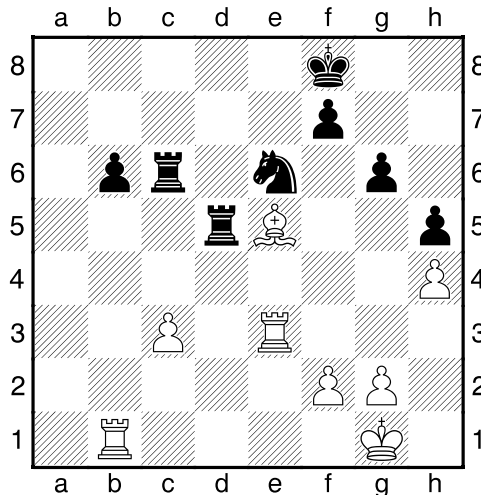
**50.Kc3 Kg7 51.Kd4 Kh6 52.Ke5 Kxh5 53.Kd6 Be8 54.c4 e5 55.Kxe5 Bf7 56.Bd1+ Kg5 57.c5**

**1-0**

That left me on 6/7 and so, just an hour or so later, I was back on board 2 against the eventual winner. All went well for the first 3 hours, but then tiredness finally got the better of me. As Jonathan Rowson reminds us all in his Seven Deadly Chess Sins you must never give in to 'wanting' a result too much or try to force simplifications too eagerly.

**Kett, Tim (2230) – Moradiabadi, Elshan (2550) [B14]**

Gent Open (8.2), 17.07.2018



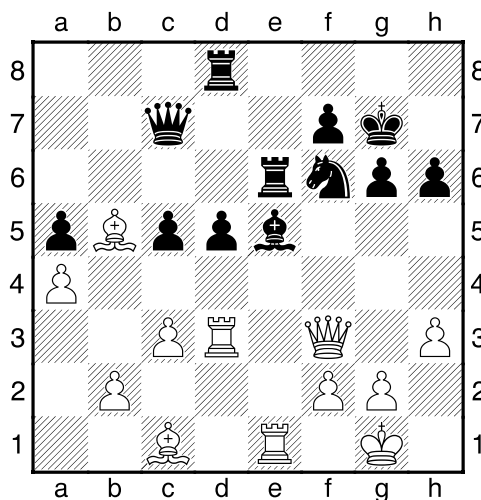
[White is completely solid, and the position is completely equal. The bishop is not going to be badly restricted by having all its pawns on the same colour and if I had simply continued 45.g3, it really is hard to envisage how White might lose. With 2 minutes (plus increments) left though, against my opponents 45, I suddenly saw an opportunity to swap the Q-side pawns and in my haste to grab it overlooked that I lose my h-pawn into the bargain.]

**32.c4? Rxc4 33.Rxb6 Rd1+ 34.Kh2 Rxh4+ 35.Kg3 Rg4+ 36.Kh2** [Now this position should still be a draw of course, but Black now has a tangible pawn plus as well the more flexible minor piece. I knew he would torture me forever from here and so pretty soon lashed out with another unsound pawn move and went down relatively quickly (0-1, 56)]

And so to the final round where only another win would now do to reach the prizes. My opponent was similarly rated to myself and fortunately not inclined to explore my inadequate opening knowledge. After a tame Four Knights Scotch line we reached the following:

**Middelhoven,Hein (2214) – Kett,Tim (2230) [C47]**

Gent Open (9.7), 18.07.2018



Black is starting to feel more comfortable and White is shifting into defensive mode.]

**28.Kf1** [to avoid Bh2+ tricks, but White's King is no safer here. Its time to up the tempo]



**28...Ne4 29.Qd1 Bf4!** [Now White realises that Kf1 may have made it easier for the BQ to reach h2]

**30.g3?** [The toughest defence was to return with 30.Kg1!]

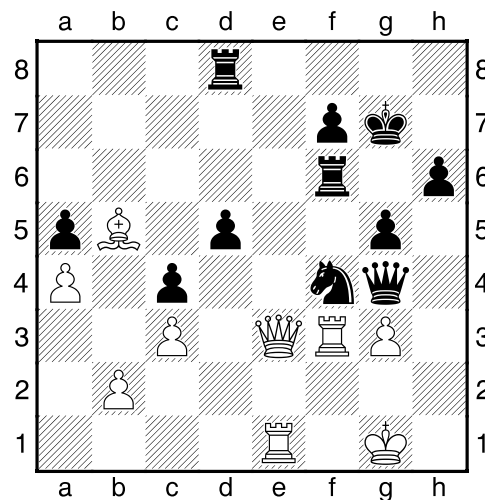
[The quick win I was hoping for was 30.Rxd5? Bxc1! 31.Rxd8 Qh2]

**30...Bxc1 31.Qxc1 Rf6 32.f4 c4 33.Rf3 Ng5 34.Rfe3 Qc8!** [and the game should be over, but last-round nerves can play funny tricks...]

**35.Kg1 Nxh3+ 36.Kg2 Qg4 37.Rf3 g5** [unnecessary]

[simply 37...Ng5! puts too difficult a question to the Rf3 38.Rf2 (or 38.Rfe3 Rxf4) 38...Qh3+]

**38.Qe3 Nxf4+ 39.Kg1**



**39...Re6?** [With the d4-g7 diagonal having been covered for so long I simply forgot that this allows

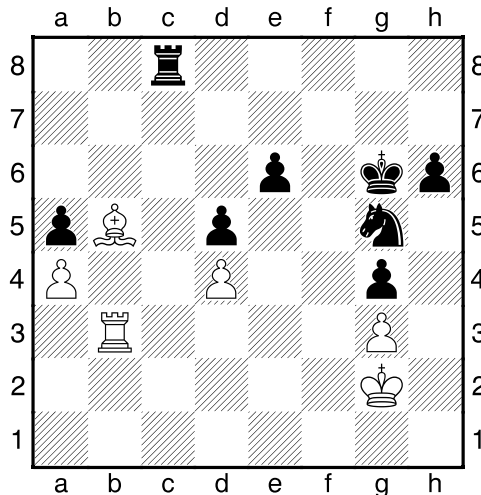
Qd4+. It was a horrible momentary shock and then a relief to realise the damage wasn't too bad. A

moments thought should have been enough to see the simple win]

[39...Nh3+ 40.Kg2 Rxf3 41.Qxf3 Nf4+ 42.Kf2 Nd3+ etc]

**40.Qd4+ Kg6 41.Rxe6+ fxe6 42.Kf2 Nh3+** [42...Nd3+! 43.Rxd3 Rf8+ 44.Ke1 Qh3 would have been winning more quickly – as I suspected at the time – but was far too hard to calculate with 2 mins left.]

**43.Kg2 Qxd4 44.cxd4 g4 45.Re3 Ng5 46.b3 cxb3 47.Rxb3 Rc8**



and fortunately Black's position is still comfortably winning]

**48.Bd3+ Kf6 49.Kf2 Rc1 50.Rb5 Rd1 51.Ke2 Rg1 52.Rxa5 Rg2+**

**0-1**

And that left me with a “no draws” 7/9 half a point behind the outright winner Moradiabadi and =2<sup>nd</sup> in a large bunch including Epishin and the top Belgians Michiels, Docx etc. I won E300 but would happily have traded that for the event being FIDE-rated ! Sadly (for me) they have made a decision (as per Bunratty and some others, I guess) that they want players to come and play without fear or pressure from ratings and enjoy the festival atmosphere. After losing over 20 points at the SWI though I was a bit miffed that saved my best performance for a couple of years for this occasion !

Both Tom (Brown) and the one other Welshman to make the trip, David James, finished on 5.5 – respectable but in both cases with a couple of near-misses and should-have-beens that could have put them in the money too. David’s highlight was a draw (and near win) on board 1 in round 3 against the no.1 seed Belgian GM, Bart Michiels.

All in all a highly enjoyable tourney that all three of us reckon we’re sure to return to – and one which is enjoying its growing reputation near the top of the calendar of favourite holiday chess destinations.

Tim Kett  
July 2018